

**FEATHER RIVER TRIBAL HEALTH, INC.***Sponsoring Tribes: Berry Creek Rancheria, Mooretown Rancheria & Enterprise Rancheria*

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March 16, 2009

State Treasurer Bill Lockyer
California State Treasurer's Office
915 Capitol Mall, Room 110
Sacramento, CA 95814

Finance Director Mike Genest
California Department of Finance
915 L Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Protect Medi-Cal Adult Dental Program Above All Other "Optional" Health Services

Dear State Treasurer Lockyer and Finance Director Genest:

Native American health clinics in California are part of a health care system that is chronically under funded and highly dependent on the Medi-Cal program to provide vital dental care to adult patients from all backgrounds. In light of this, if budget reductions must be made to the vast Medi-Cal program, please retain adult dental care.

To be specific, please protect the Medi-Cal adult dental program above all other "optional" Medi-Cal benefits. If budget cuts are required of optional services provided under this benefits plan, please retain adult dental while eliminating other proposed optional services. We ask that you consider reclassifying adult dental care as part of the basic medical benefits package rather than as an optional benefit.

Federal guidelines establish core Medicaid services. Evidence-based medicine demonstrates that oral health should be an integral part of **BASIC** medical care and **NOT** an optional benefit. We ask that you please work with the federal Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services to reclassify adult dental care.

Oral health status affects the individual's overall health, well being, and the ability to be productive in the work place due to pain, infection, and associated dental visits. Poor oral health not only results in needless and avoidable pain and suffering but is also associated with a variety of other diseases and conditions, including respiratory disease, diabetes, stroke, heart disease, and preterm and low birth weight deliveries. If the estimated 2.8 million adults in California lose access to dental services, if the current proposal to eliminate the Medi-Cal adult dental program as a cost cutting measure is enacted, the results could have significant impact on the viability of our Native American health care programs.

AAAHC Accredited Organization

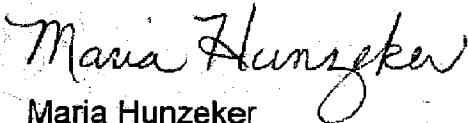
State Treasurer, Bill Lockyer
Finance Director, Mike Genest
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The program's elimination could result in the loss of at least \$115 million of federal matching funds and have the end result of substituting more expensive services for less expensive treatments and preventive services. It would exacerbate the problem of the safety net programs by placing more pressure on community clinics and emergency rooms. Other significant ramifications include lower participation by dentists in the program and, ultimately, significant oral health and medical problems in racial and ethnic communities, pregnant women, low-income, disabled and elderly adults.

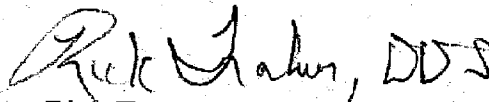
As a public health program, we have already seen that oral disease has become what many experts now call "the silent epidemic," causing chronic suffering for millions of people and disproportionately affecting low-income families, communities of color, and the elderly. Experts cite a complex interaction of factors as the cause of California's oral health disparities and disease epidemic. There is already a documented decrease in the number of practicing dental professionals, especially in low-income neighborhoods. Add to that, fear of treatment, lack of economic incentives for dental professionals to serve low-income populations; poor coordination between providers of primary care and dental care; massive numbers of people with no dental insurance; insufficient amounts of public funding for dental care; inefficient use of available resources; lack of public awareness about ways to prevent oral disease; lack of understanding of oral health issues by numerous decision makers; and lack of effective government policy to correct these problems. Given this detrimental situation, the most effective, efficient, and immediate approach to treating the factors causing this growing statewide problem is the strongest consideration in protecting and maintaining the Medi-Cal adult dental program.

We understand the need for the state to make adjustments to its programs. Please consider an option that will, in the long run, save the state money. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Maria Hunzeker
Executive Director



Rick Trahin, DDS
Dental Director

cc: Board of Directors